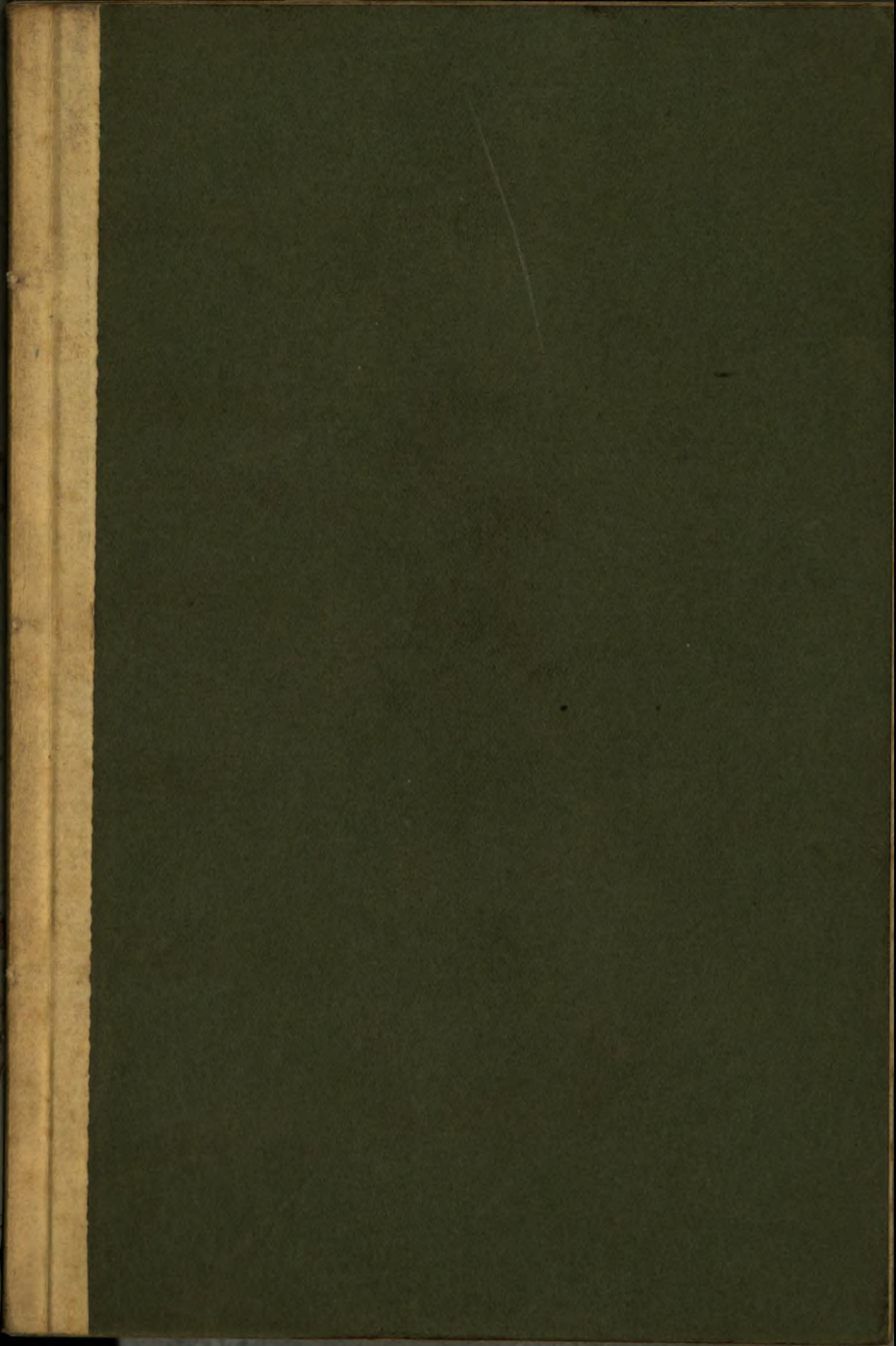

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THE RENEWED LIFE
OF THE
CISTERCIAN ORDER IN ENGLAND.

A SERMON PREACHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE
OF OUR LADY'S ABBEY, MOUNT ST. BERNARD, JULY, 16, 1886.

BY

THE VERY REV. F. JOHN PROCTER, O.P.,

PRIOR OF HOLY CROSS, LEICESTER.

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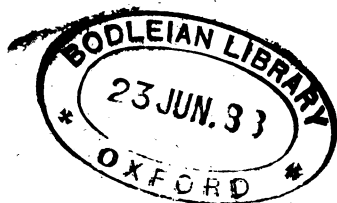
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THE CISTERCIAN ORDER.

Jubilee at Mount St. Bernard's.

"In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen: and I will close up the breaches of the walls thereof, and repair what is fallen: and I will rebuild it as in the days of old."—AMOS ix. 11.

MY LORDS, VERY REVEREND AND REVEREND FATHERS, AND DEAR BRETHREN IN JESUS CHRIST,—

Every age has, in the eternal designs, its apportioned work—a work distinct and definite, a work different from the work as well of its parent as of its offspring age. The work allotted to us in this age and in this land is that to which the Prophet alludes—"To raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen," "to close up the breaches of the walls thereof," "to repair what was fallen," "to rebuild it as in the days of old." These are days when, like the Jews, with one hand we must build up, whilst in the other we hold a sword. (2nd Esdras 4.) We have to plant, and to sow, and to rebuild. Our fathers in the evil day, laid waste the vineyard, and we must restore it; they uprooted the forests, and we must replant them; they destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, and it falls to us to rebuild them. "*Benigne fac Domine*" must be our prayer with the Psalmist. "Deal favourably, O Lord, in Thy goodwill with Sion, that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up;" and not our *prayer* only, but the prayer must be realized in the activity of our life. It must be, and it has been. For what has been the outcome of the undying vitality of the Catholic Church in England in these last days? We see it around us, in part accomplished, and in part going on. There are

"Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything."

We have our "sermons in stones," and we have to raise other stones to be sermons to those who are to come. Canterbury and Lincoln, Lichfield and Durham, have gone from us: and we, on their ruins, or rather under the shadow of their fallen greatness, have to rebuild other Canterburys, other Lincolns, other Lichfields, other Durhams. This we have done in a modest and unpretentious way in every great city and commercial town, in every centre around which men gather for trade and traffic; yes, in almost every village and hamlet throughout the land. Our prayer has been answered—"Deal favourably, O Lord, in Thy good-

will with Sion," and "the walls of Jerusalem" have been "built up." "We have raised the tabernacle of David that was fallen;" we have "closed the breaches of the walls thereof," we have "rebuilt it as in the days of old."

But, dear Brethren, besides the Canterburys, and Lineolns, and Lichfields, and Durhams, there was Tintern on the banks of the Wye, and Fountains in the romantic valley of the Skell; and Kirkstall in Yorkshire; and Netley near the green slopes of the Southampton waters; and Melrose, which Sir Walter Scott has made to live again in poetry and prose. Were they to remain in eternal doom? Were they to be things of the past? Were we to have no other homes of peaceful seclusion where the spirit of St. Bernard, and St. Robert and St. Stephen Harding was to abide: where men, inflamed with the love of God, might give themselves without reserve, to the service of the Most High: from which, as from a living censer, the incense of prayer and praise might ascend before the eternal throne: in which the words of the Psalmist might be realized again: "In the dead of the night I arose to give glory to Thy name," and, "Seven times each day I sent forth Thy praise?" . . . The answer to the question was given Fifty years ago, and with joy we celebrate its glad Jubilee to-day.

Sixty years ago this part of Charnwood Forest, which in olden times (so it is supposed) was one of the favoured sanctuaries of the Druidical rites, was, if we except some forty acres which were under cultivation, far different from what we who have walked or driven through it this morning have seen it. It was a rough place, indeed, and rugged, a mere "moorland covered with fern, gorse, heather, and beds of loose stones, with several bold projections of sharp-pointed and deeply-cleft granite rock"—nothing but "a tract of wild desert land." But the good Monks came here clad in the Cistercian habit, and fired with the Cistercian spirit, and we have seen the transformation. The desert has become a smiling garden. The rushing stream has been brought into subjection, and made to serve the purposes of man. The weeds have given place to trees and plants, and vegetables, and bright flowers. The rough stones have been hewn and cut, and carved, and chiselled, and formed into this church and monastic home, simple in its severity, and severe in its simplicity, and yet beautiful withal—the abode of God and the calm peaceful resting-place of His creatures as they pass through the desert and the valley from His earthly to His heavenly home. And now for fifty years this forest has been sanctified by the Spirit of God floating in the balmy air. For fifty years these walls have re-echoed with the notes of the church's Plain song, which has arisen day and night, and, blended with the angels' melody, gone up to the eternal throne. For fifty years the solemn ritual, the worship of earth, has vied with the ritual of heaven in doing honour to the Lord God. Candles have spent themselves, and incense has been wafted above, and flowers have shed their perfume, and men have given their service—body, soul, mind, and heart—to Him from whom nature as well as grace comes as from

its undying source. Another answer has been granted to the Psalmist's prayer—"Deal favourably, O Lord, in thy goodwill with Sion that the walls of Jerusalem may be built up." Another realization has been given the inspired Seer's prophetic words—"In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen : and I will close up the breaches in the walls thereof, and repair what is fallen : and I will rebuild it as in the days of old."

"But why," men ask, "has all this been done?" "Why in this practical matter-of-fact age do you build in a forest, away from the haunts of men? Why in these days of electricity and steam do you cut yourselves off from the centres of civilization, and refinement, and human culture? Why do you go back to the effete institutions of ages buried in the long past? Why in these busy, boisterous times, when every brain, and every mind, and every hand is engaged in bringing nature into subjection to art, and creatures to man—why bring back a dead thing which lived seven or eight hundred years ago? Why introduce into this England of ours a life which essentially calls for retirement, and seclusion, and rude penance, and hard fasts, and unceasing prayer, and stern self-denial—a life which runs diametrically counter to the spirit of the present age? Why this waste of health, and strength, and mind, and precious life?"

Ah! Brethren, this is a Judas cry—"Why this waste? Could it not have been sold for much, and the money have been given to the poor?" It is a Judas cry, and it comes from the lips of those who in the spirit of the time, and to meet its warped views, would sell their Master for paltry silver pieces. Such men would have said of *Moses*, as he stood upon the mountain, whilst fearful war was being waged between Israel and Amalec—"Why stands he there with uplifted hands—why does he cause two others to come up and support his uplifted hands? Let him come down into the valley, let him put on a coat of mail, and take the spear in his hand and fight bravely in the interests of his people." Ah! Brethren, he fights more valiantly than the rest, although he has withdrawn from them. For see! when the hands fall, Israel is overcome, but when they are uplifted, Israel overcomes—and so he prays, and *his prayer*, and not their arms, gains the victory for God's chosen people (Exod. 17). Such men would have said of *Joshua and his army*, as they walked in procession around the impregnable walls of Jericho, singing Psalms and Canticles of praise—"Silly men, why do they pray and not work; why do they not prepare their weapons and wield them well; why do they not rush with terrible assault against those walls and try to destroy their enemies' strength?" But look, dear brethren, as they laugh, the walls fall down at the end of the seventh day's prayer, and to prayer was given that which God denied to power (Josue 6.)

They who condemn this life of prayer, would have blamed *Elias* on Carmel, as, clad in his mantle of sheepskin, he merely prayed to God against the Four Hundred and Fifty Prophets of Baal, and the Four Hundred Prophets of the grove—yet God approved,

and showed His approval by a miracle of stupendous power. And when he sat under the Juniper tree, abandoned by all, and dying for want of food, and prayed to the God of Hosts, they would have said—"Arise, and go into the city, and seek the food which must be thy stay"—but God sent a heavenly messenger, the bearer of bread, in whose strength he was able to walk to Horeb, the mountain of the Most High. This age, too, would rise up in condemnation of the *Baptist John*, for that he was clothed in camel's hair and girded with a leathern cincture, and ate locusts and wild honey, and spent his days from early youth in a lonely desert. The very *Angels* themselves can hardly be holy in the sight of such men, for if we except the comparatively few who are sent on heavenly messages of Divine love, how do they spend their existence but in simple, joyous, peaceful praise and contemplation?

Nay, is the *Son of Man* without reproach, for did not He pass thirty of His three and thirty years in the obscurity of Nazareth, and then forty days in the desert, and much even of the remaining time in lonely converse with His Father?

Yes! dear Brethren, a man may spend his days in hunting and shooting and making merry, and his nights in another round of pleasure, and maybe sin; a woman may fritter away her precious hours in frivolous novel reading, in idle sinful gossip, in balls and parties, and vanities of every kind, and the world looks on and respects them, and is satisfied that they are doing their duty to their fellows. But, let them use their liberty, and renounce all this, and consecrate their days and nights to God, in peace, in prayer, in retirement, in contemplation, and the world turns its eyes to heaven in pious horror, and is shocked and scandalised, because they waste the talents that God has given them! Is it a waste of life to give that life to God from whom it came? Is it a squandering of time to spend the days and nights in His service who sent us into the world to work for Him? Is it a prostitution of talents to dedicate them to Him who gave them? Is a life idle because it is spent in prayer and penance, instead of being passed in pleasure and sin? Silly, foolish, frivolous, fleeting world, look and admire as you career on in your giddy way, and if you have not the courage to follow in the higher path, at least respect those who do.

But is this life a wasted life even as regards the rest of men?

The monastery on the hills, or in the valley, or secluded in the desert, is a *standing protest* to the world, a beacon of light, a faithful monitor, a warning voice. As a giant figure of colossal proportions it stands, one moment with threatening hand pointing to earth and telling of God's justice, another with uplifted finger to the heavens, telling of God's mercy and love. How worldly are Christians in the world, for the most part. They do not fulfil the divine word: "You are in the world, but you are not of the world." They are in the world, and they are of the world. The worldly spirit pervades their life, and palsies their mind, and paralyzes their souls, and unnerves their moral being. They are drowned in

the sea of pleasure, they are swallowed up in the vortex of sin, they are engulfed in the abyss of worldly cares and business—they think not of God and their souls. Now the life of a Cistercian is to such a standing reproof. Their solemn and perpetual silence is a protest against sins of the tongue. Their abstinences a protest against the gluttony of the world. Their austere penance reproaches pleasure-loving, self-seeking men. Their unceasing prayer tells men of their own faithlessness to God. Their rude retirement rebukes the love of the word and the flesh, and the pride of life—the “three concupiscences,” of which St. John says that “they are not of the Father.” When the Baptist came from the desert with his girded loins and his penitential garb, men listened to him *because* he came from the desert. When Jesus Christ came forth to preach, His voice had gained strength in retirement. The solitaries of Arabia, of Palestine, and Syria, although they went not amongst men, yet had they an untold influence for good over the neighbouring cities and towns—the odour of their virtues floated in the air, and fell with gentle sweetness upon the souls of their fellow-men. So now, although the rose is hidden, its perfume is scented—and the more it is hidden the more is its fragrance perceived. The less a Cistercian sees of the world, the more useful is his life to men. Was it not Seneca who said, “Whenever I go amongst men, I return less a man.” I would add, “the more a Cistercian goes amongst men, the less he returns a Cistercian, and the less use is he to the world.” The secret of his success amongst men is not to know men—for the world knows him, though he knows not the world. Men are keen and quick-witted—they see much, even if they say little, and, remember, that the desert, though removed from the world, yet is it near to the haunts of men. They hear the monastery bells, and its tones go to their very soul. They know of the rude life, and its rudeness touches them to the quick. They are not ignorant of its austerities, and the knowledge is as salt to the earth. They are awake to the constant prayer, and that awakening is as balm to their hearts. The Cedars of Lebanon were planted in a forest, and the apple blossoms and the pomegranates of the Canticle grew in a desert, but they did not therefore lose their odour.

Yes, again, dear Brethren, I repeat it—the life of a Cistercian, buried though he be in a desert, whether of old on the banks of the Wye, in the secluded cells of Tintern, or in the beautiful valley of Fountains, or to-day in this forest of Charnwood—such a life is not lost to the world. *Flowers* do not grow in the highways of our busy towns. *Fruit* that is sweet is not found in the streets of the city. *Water* that is cool and refreshing does not rush on with mad impetuosity in the wild resistless stream. *Gold and Precious Stones* do not form the pavement of our market places and public squares. No! You must look for the sweet water in the placid lakes on the top of the mountains, or in the gentle rippling stream in the lonely dell. You must seek the fragrant flower and the luscious fruit in the garden, the forest, or by the desert stream. You must penetrate into the bowels of the earth or dive the deep depths of the

sea if you would discover the pearl, or gold, or precious stone ! So with religious men, some are called to active life in the busy marts of men ; but others as the still water, and the gentle flower, have to live away from the familiar haunts—with Elias on Carmel, with Jacob in Bethel, with Moses on the mountain, with the Baptist in the desert, with Peter and James and John on Thabor, for it is good for them to be there. Even as in the nine choirs of blessed Spirits, there are angels and archangels who are sent on errands of heavenly love ; but there are other choirs, Seraphim and Cherubim, and Thrones, and Dominations and Powers, who stand ever before the Throne and sing the never-failing canticle to the Lamb, so is it on earth. We, my reverend Brethren of the Secular and Regular Priesthood, who are engaged in active work, we are chosen by the Most High to be His earthly ministering spirits, to preach, to visit the sick, to anoint, to pardon, to carry the Gospel message. But the Seraphim and Cherubim of the earth are the men and women of contemplation—they must rest not day or night singing, Holy, holy, holy, to Him who was, and who is, and who is to come. Still, even as Moses on the mountain aided those who fought against the hosts of Amalec in the plain, so are the members of the Contemplative Orders the right hand, and the muscle, and the strength of us who are active warriors in the great battle against the spirits of Darkness in the air.

They represent us before the throne of God. What would the world be without men of prayer ?—What Sodom was without its ten just ones—what Israel would have been without the intercessory aid of Moses. If the world is what it is, notwithstanding all these prayers which ascend each day from thousands of hearts throughout its length and breadth, what would it be were they all to cease ?—It would be as the earth without the sun, as the ground without water, as a body without a soul, as was chaos before God spoke the Omnipotent Creative word. These Monks are not selfish men—the love of God, like light and heat, is self-diffusive—and so they ever pray for us. They pray for sinners that they may be converted, and live ; they pray for the tempted, that they may gain strength to resist the tempter's sway ; they pray for the weak that they may become strong ; they pray for the holy that they may become holier still. And surely this grand chorus of prayer which arises from early morn to early morn again from these walls, and mingles with the songs of the birds, and then blends with the angel's song—surely this chorus must bring down blessings upon the sons of men ! Yes, surely. Never till the Judgment day shall we know what fruit this seed has brought forth in the soul, in the church, and in the kingdoms of the world. This, we know, that when the Monks were banished, and a price set upon their heads, England ceased to be what she was of yore, and when the Monks were taken back to England's heart, she began to receive the Divine One, and the heaven-sent message of faith.

I might tell you again how that these monasteries are havens of

rest to the wearied minds, and troubled spirits, and anxious, earnest souls of men—havens in which some for weeks or months, others for their life-long years, find refuge from the waves and the storm.

I might, too, remind you that they are homes of the poor, where in all times, and even now in our day, those whom the Gospel calls "blessed," may find shelter, and home, and food—so that when the monasteries are destroyed in a land, the poor have to be at the mercy of men, and are forced to enter Institutions where poverty is branded as a crime.

You know, moreover, that they are the sanctuaries of art, and science, and learning, and that in them the books of the Ancients, and even the Book of the Word of God, have been preserved from the ravages of time and the havoc wrought by the passions or the rapacity of man. You see it even in this place to-day—in the once bleak, barren rocks and hills now converted into fruitful gardens; in the cultivation of arts and sciences; in the practice of various handicrafts for the use or the enjoyment of men.

Need I remind you, too, that sometimes at the bidding of God's vicar, the Monk will leave his monastic home and peaceful cell, as Elias and Moses left the mountain, to labour as chief ministers in the vineyard of the Father. As the water on the mountain top is attracted by the rays of the sun, and then falls on the parched earth, giving greenness to the grass, redness to the rose, and fragrance to the heliotrope, and sustaining power to the corn—so are they sometimes drawn from the heights of contemplation to minister to the needs of the church. Four Cistercians have been Popes—vicars of Christ in the world. Many have worn the crimson robes of the Church's Princes. Over two thousand have, as Archbishops and Bishops, governed the spiritual destinies of portions of God's heritage on earth.

You see, therefore, that they have, despite all the world may say, their influence upon the rest of their fellows. They leave their mark in the chronicles of each age. They have a share in the designs of God.

Here then, my Brethren, you have a brief reply to the question we put in the beginning: Why bring to life again this thing that was dead,—and why rejoice to-day that it has had fifty years of renewed life? You see the meaning of the Cistercian order, and you understand why it was instituted so many hundred years ago, under the inspiration indeed of God, but through the instrumentality of such great servants of His as St. Robert, and St. Bernard, and St. Stephen Harding whose Feast we are celebrating to-day. You see why the little seed grew and became a tree, spreading its sheltering branches into Germany, and France, and Switzerland, and Italy, and even into this land surrounded by the sea.

You see, in fine, why, through the prayers of many and the generosity of a few, and the sacrifices of noble God-loving hearts, it began a new life in our midst, some fifty years ago, when this place was laid out and this monastery built as an oasis in the desert, a

silver spring amidst the dry parched land, a mountain in the midst of the valleys, a place of refuge, and a home for the earnest soul.

May God on this great day of Jubilee inspire some good Christian mind and heart, with the thought of removing the heavy incubus of debt which lies upon this house of peace. If any man should be free from worldly care and from anxiety about earthly things, surely it is the Cistercian, be he Abbot or Prior or simple religious man. May God, then, who feeds the birds and paints the lily white, and who can send food by the raven's beak, may He send help to them that their minds and hearts may be free from earthly chains to rest upon the bosom of God.

May the spirit of solitude ever flourish in this hallowed place, and may it ever be a desert of peace. May the mantle of Bernard of Clairvaux and Robert of Citeaux, and our own St. Stephen fall upon all who dwell in this sanctuary. I do not mean the material mantle which they already wear, for "the habit does not make the Monk ;" but the supernatural mantle, and with it their double Cistercian spirit—the spirit of solitude, recollection, retirement, estrangement from the world and from men, and the spirit of prayer and union with God.

And may the Father of Lights in His own good time raise up other houses of calm peaceful solitude in this country, other oases in this desert land, other sources of living water in this arid plain, other havens of rest on the banks of the troubled waters, where men may abide with God and God may abide with men.

